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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9713

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 2987

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0805

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0679

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 1255

RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1902

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: A PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

REF: ASHGABAT 1239

Classified By: CHARGE RICHARD E. HOAGLAND FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Turkmenistan has one of the most opaque political systems in the world. The decision-making process and relationships among the various elites are difficult for outside observers to ascertain. However, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) country director Tony Myron (strictly protect) has spent four years in Turkmenistan and developed a wide range of contacts in the country's political/economic circles, which has allowed him to peek behind this opaque curtain. For example, Myron is able to pick up the phone and talk to Central Bank Chief Geldimurat Abylov. In fact, according to Myron, the evening following the recent sudden drop in the unofficial dollar exchange rate (reftel), Myron sat down with Abylov and Abylov's deputy to discuss what it all means. On November 17, Myron shared with us some of what he has learned about Turkmenistan's leadership.

WHY BERDIMUHAMEDOV?

¶2. (C) According to Myron's sources, elites chose President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to succeed former president Niyazov, because the constitutional successor, Mejlis (Parliament) Speaker Ovezgeldi Atayev, quickly showed he would be a danger to them. Reportedly, later on the day of Niyazov's death, several of the deputy chairmen of the Cabinet of Ministers and some ministers gathered together to discuss next steps. Atayev, who as Speaker of the Parliament, should have been the acting president, came to the meeting dead drunk. (NOTE: It is unclear if Atayev had been drinking because he heard the news or was summoned to the meeting while he had been drinking. END NOTE.) Thinking that his position was secure, Atayev started to berate those assembled and told them he was going to get his revenge for how he had been treated during Niyazov's rule. He started pointing at the various attendees and screaming that he would arrest each one. Led by Minister of Defense Agageldi Mammetgeldiyev, who was one of those singled out by

Atayev for punishment, the group decided that Atayev had to go. Myron said Berdimuhamedov was chosen because he was viewed as someone who would want a departure from Niyazov's methods. While Berdimuhamedov had avoided arrest or public censure during Niyazov's rule, his day was rapidly coming. He was under pressure from the old regime and his deputy had been tortured. In addition, relatives had also suffered under Niyazov's rule.

FAMILY TIES

¶3. (C) Myron said that the wife of Vneshekonombank Chairman Guvanch Goklenov is the sister of Berdimuhamedov's wife. Myron said Goklenov will likely replace Abylov as head of the Central Bank, if heads roll over the recent exchange rate problem. Goklenov is also the nephew of Minister of Textiles Jemal Goklenova. Myron offered that one reason Chalik Holdings Chairman Ahmet Chalik's fortunes have dipped under this new regime is because Berdimuhamedov believes that Chalik, who at one point had been vice minister in charge of textile imports while Goklenova was Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers for textiles, was responsible for her imprisonment. According to rumor, Goklenova had wanted to see more authority for textile export decisions given to a Turkmen citizen, which would have greatly decreased Chalik's authority. Chalik went to Niyazov and, only a few weeks later, Goklenova was first demoted, then imprisoned by the former president.

PRESIDENTIAL CHICKENS

¶4. (C) Myron is not the only European in Ashgabat with ties

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to the leadership. Myron said Luigi Fontana-bona, General Director for the Nissa and President Hotels, had close ties to Niyazov and maintains those ties to Berdimuhamedov. Fontana-bona and cohorts from his town in Italy are involved with a number of the hotels in Ashgabat. One also serves as the president's personal chef and another is in charge of the president's chicken farm. Roberto Pizzotti, the former General Manager of the President Hotel, used to be in charge of the president's chicken farm, but was fired recently from that position and his job at the hotel over some (unspecified) issue involving the farm.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Myron's sources are as good as anyone's, and his information about the family relationships is probably unimpeachable. What is clear is that relationships play an enormous role in who is allowed to have power here. END

COMMENT.

HOAGLAND